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DE RUEHLB #0608/01 0601326
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 011326Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2236
INFO RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 0448

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000608

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TUNIS FOR MEPI - MULREAN
DEPT FOR NEA PDAS CARPENTER AND NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2016
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: QUARTERLY REPORT ON FREEDOM AGENDA IN
LEBANON

REF: A. 05 STATE 152818

[1B](#). 05 BEIRUT 2208
[1C](#). 05 BEIRUT 3204

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

INTRODUCTION

[11](#). (C) This is post's progress report for the first quarter of FY-06 on the country strategy for democratic reform. Refs A and B identified three outcomes for our country strategy:

- a new electoral law,
- competent, effective, transparent government, and
- reform of the judiciary.

[12](#). (U) The last quarterly progress report submitted was Ref [1C](#). Post's MEPI executive committee has since reviewed progress made toward these three outcomes over the first quarter of FY-06. Following are the main issues in each area.

A NEW ELECTORAL LAW

[13](#). (SBU) The National Electoral Law Reform Commission appointed by Prime Minister Siniora's government and charged with drafting a new electoral law continued to work towards a deadline of January 8. To make the process as transparent as possible, the commission offered the chance to have a say to interested members of the public. A large number of groups and individuals submitted a total of 121 proposals -- either complete draft laws or proposals on specific aspects of the electoral law -- and testified before the commission. Public participation in the process culminated in a two-day workshop with Commission members in late November, held in the Grand Serail, the seat of government.

[14](#). (SBU) Following this, Commission members retired behind closed doors to deliberate and draft a proposed new law, along with comprehensive supporting documentation. (Note: Just after the end of the quarter, the deadline was extended to the end of February 2006.) In discussions with Lebanese interlocutors, the Ambassador and emboffs emphasized the importance of genuine electoral reform as a deliverable for the Siniora government, demonstrating its ability to implement a broader reform agenda with the support of "Core Group" friends of Lebanon.

[15](#). (SBU) In support of the technical secretariat organized

by the UN for the commission, IFES, funded by the DRL bureau, arranged for internationally-reputed elections experts to serve as consultants for the Commission. IFES experts were also available to respond to specific research and analysis taskings from individual Commission members. Given the paucity of support staff and other resources at the Commission members' disposal, their ability to tap IFES expertise was invaluable.

¶6. (SBU) Also during this quarter, the Embassy coordinated closely with an informal consortium of Lebanese and international NGOs (IFES among them) preparing for "phase two" of the electoral reform process, which begins when the Commission submits a proposed draft law and supporting documentation to the Prime Minister. The consortium's strategy for "phase two" will focus on public awareness of electoral reform as a way of building constituencies for change.

¶7. (SBU) Public awareness will be of particular importance when the draft law is submitted to Parliament for debate. All members of Parliament were elected on the basis of the electoral law currently in effect, and many can be expected to resist change without "bottom-up" pressure for meaningful reform.

¶8. (SBU) In addition to DRL funding for IFES and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a USD 800,000 MEPI grant to the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) supported an ongoing public awareness project on electoral reform. NDI, LTA, and LTA's sub-grantee, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, are all members of the informal NGO electoral reform consortium.

COMPETENT, EFFECTIVE, TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

¶9. (SBU) In coordination with the Core Group, the Siniora government continued to work on a reform program -- one that included administrative reform as a component -- during the quarter. In keeping with this agenda, the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) in October 2005 launched a new program for recruiting senior civil service personnel. The program -- which announced, and accepted applications for, senior positions via the World Wide Web -- aimed at recruiting senior personnel in a way that was more merit-based, transparent, and objective than before. A committee of experts was formed to short-list applicants.

¶10. (SBU) In November 2005, Prime Minister Siniora publicly announced that he would hold three separate working sessions to brief cabinet ministers on his overall economic reform plan. The assassination of MP Gebran Tuani and the subsequent boycott of cabinet sessions by Hizballah- and Amal Movement-aligned ministers blocked further progress on this front. The cabinet boycott was not resolved until after the quarter ended. However, "buy-in" by all cabinet factions remained a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for a workable reform plan. Of the three outcome areas in our country strategy for Lebanon, this was the one most seriously affected by December's cabinet crisis.

¶11. (SBU) Specific MEPI and related programs or activities aimed at this outcome during the quarter included staff training and technical assistance for legislatures in Francophone Arab countries, Lebanon included. Post began working with NEA/PI to identify a more focused and effective follow-on program. Also, in cooperation with the Ministry of Administrative Reform, Ministry of Finance, and a number of municipalities, USAID has continued to promote transparency through "e-government" initiatives, which link municipal databases with those of the central government. Senior Embassy officials used public speaking events to press for the governmental reform agenda; these events were reported in the press along with the content of Embassy remarks.

¶12. (SBU) In response to a campaign of bombings and

assassinations aimed at destabilizing Lebanon, post's legal attache proposed using FBI training to support the creation of "evidence response teams" for the Lebanese authorities. Different elements of the mission, including the FBI and USAID, collaborated to develop a program funded by the USG's economic support fund for Lebanon. Training was to start in the next quarter.

REFORM OF THE JUDICIARY

¶13. (SBU) Lebanon's judiciary continued to suffer from a widely perceived lack of independence from political pressure during the quarter. The continued presence of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC), charged with investigating the February 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, gave the judiciary some much-needed "backbone" in tackling this highly sensitive issue. Four senior security and intelligence officials arrested at the recommendation of the UNIIIC in August 2005 remained in detention for the duration of the quarter.

¶14. (SBU) The UNIIIC's mandate was extended to the full extra three months allowed under UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1595, to December 2005. That month, the Security Council renewed the UNIIIC's mandate to June 2006 under UNSCR 1644. While the UNIIIC is of course not a MEPI initiative, a strong U.S. position in support of the UNIIIC's mission and integrity played an important role in advancing a "freedom agenda" in Lebanon, including in judicial reform.

¶15. (SBU) Specific MEPI programs or activities aimed at this outcome during the quarter included an ongoing one-year project, conducted by a local MEPI partner, on monitoring judicial sentences relevant to human rights and democracy. On the public diplomacy front, post finalized arrangements for Jean Fahd, general prosecutor of the military court, to participate in a January 2006 International Visitor Leadership Program with the themes of: 1) an introduction to the U.S. federal judicial system, 2) an independent judiciary, and 3) federal government and the rule of law.

FELTMAN